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The Counseling Service of Addison County, a community mental health clinic, began in 1966 as a four-year project under a National Institutes of Mental Health grant to determine whether emotional problems could be prevented by the early assignment of college student volunteers (from Middlebury College) to underachievers in the early grades of elementary school. This progress report covers the second year. Records, report card grades, and achievement test scores were reviewed. The California Test of Personality, the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Tests, and the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test were administered, and a behavior-rating scale was completed by the teachers. Although the data is not yet statistically significant, observations by teachers and parents were favorable. It appears that the volunteer college student is generally more stable than the average student. While all data is tentative and too early for definite conclusions, the project has continued to progress in its second phase according to the original plans. (KP)

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SUMMARY PROGRESS REPORT - NIMH Grant 5-R01-MH14783-03

Covering Period From 2/1/67 to 1/31/68

VOLUNTEERS TO PREVENT EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

Ruth Thomson, ACSW

ASSURANCE ON HUMAN SUBJECTS

The investigations encompassed by this application have been or will be approved by the committee of associates of the investigator in accordance with this institution's assurance on clinical research dated October 27 and November 15, 1966.

BACKGROUND

According to Lambert (1), "preventive programs must aim at building the strengths in children that would help them avoid behavior problems ... (and) the school is the strategic place in which to start building these strengths."

The Counseling Service of Addison County, a community mental health clinic serving a predominantly rural area of approximately 22,000 persons, has been concerned since its incorporation in 1959 with programs to prevent mental illness and promote positive mental health.

Amicatherapy, a phrase coined by William Mitchell (2) to describe the relationship between a young adult and a troubled person, "a form of therapeutic intervention whereby laymen - volunteers relate in sustained friendship roles to troubled and disturbed persons under the guidance and supervision of professionals," has been successfully practiced by the Counseling Service utilizing Middlebury College students to serve as big brothers and sisters to children exhibiting certain behavioral patterns.

Extending this relationship into the area of prevention, the Counseling Service began in 1966 a project under a four-year NIMH grant to determine whether emotional problems could be prevented by the early assignment of college student volunteers to underachievers in the early grades of elementary school. This would, then, in consideration of Bower (3), constitute a program of secondary prevention, which "is what is done for identifiable vulnerable groups."

Also to be observed during the course of the project were the changes in the college students in order to evaluate the effect of the experience for them in terms of their own living.

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROJECT

2-1-66 through 1-31-67

As reported previously, the first year of the project was smooth, with the interviewing and selection of forty college student volunteers from the Middlebury College class of 1969, the selection of forty children for service from the 1966 first and third grades of the Middlebury Elementary School and the selection of controls, 100 college students chosen at random from the non-volunteering members

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of the class of 1969 and forty underachievers in the second and fourth grades of the elementary school.

Assignment of college students to third graders was accomplished in October, 1966.

SCHEDULE OF THE CURRENT YEAR

The first grade service group was assigned volunteers in February, 1967. While it was planned to assign a total of forty college students, twenty were actually assigned to third graders, eleven men and nine women, and fifteen were assigned to first graders, eleven men and four women.

Assignments were accomplished in accordance with a planned procedure. The volunteers selected for the third graders were invited to attend a group meeting upon their return for the 1966 fall semester. At the meeting they were introduced to the co-director of the project, who had been employed after the end of the last semester, given a general explanation of their roles in the program, and received answers to questions that they had since their initial interview with the psychiatric social worker. Subsequently, these volunteers met individually with the co-director and were given a general briefing on the child to whom they would be assigned. The volunteer was informed only of family circumstances or previously observed characteristics of the child that might cause embarrassment to either him or the child if not known. If the child, for instance, came from a fatherless home, as several did, it was felt prudent to let the volunteer know this. Also, it seemed wise to caution the volunteer in regard to activities if his child was unusually handicapped in any particular area.

In the past we have found that volunteers tend to become disappointed when, after short acquaintence, the child whom they have befriended appears to have little or no need of help. This disillusionment was particularly anticipated since this project was designed to prevent emotional problems and the children had not shown sufficient symptoms for referral. It should be noted, however, that these underachievers did, as a group, perform considerably less well than their classmates on personality and behavior rating tests. To prevent this expected attitude of disappointment, it was emphasized, both at the initial group meeting and the subsequent individual interviews, that this was a project to prevent deterioration and changes in behavior, if any, would be imperceptible rather than dramatic. Despite the effort to prevent this attitude of futility, some of the volunteers did express their belief that their little brother or sister did not belong in the program. When asked to think how they would have responded if they as elementary school youngsters had had a college "friend", they unanimously conceded that perhaps there was more benefit to the child than immediately apparent.

The final step before starting weekly meetings was to introduce the volunteer to the child and his parents at their home. It was at that time that the day of the meeting was selected and the method of transportation was arranged. The reception of the volunteer by the parents was invariably good.

The first meetings began during the first week in October, 1966 and by the end of the month all twenty third graders had begun to meet with their volunteers. Although during the first weeks of the program some of the volunteers expressed trepidation about what to do with the child, as a genuine friendship developed,

their anxiety was allayed. The boys generally watched or played sports. When it rained or if the weather became too cold for outdoor activities, there was the gym to play in, the psychology and geology laboratories to visit. There were parlor games to play, models to build or television to watch. And the fraternity house kitchen usually offered a snack of milk and cookies.

The girls spent more time making things. Frequently the girl volunteers would arrive at the elementary school to pick up their little sisters burdened with packages of yarn, or paints, or cookie mixes. It was rare indeed when the child would go home without bringing something for her parents to see or eat.

During the first months following the assignment of volunteers to third graders, only a few incidents arose to mar an otherwise perfect program. The first happened when one of the female volunteers decided to drop out of the project. Lost class time because of illness made it difficult for her to continue. She was replaced immediately. A second female volunteer was forced to leave school because of illness. She, too, was replaced immediately. One male volunteer, called in to see the co-director about his absenteeism and frequent tardiness, decided to withdraw. He was quickly replaced. One of the children from the service group, a girl, was withdrawn by her parents with an explanation by the mother that she felt the child would receive greater benefit from playing with children in her own age group. These parents had been somewhat reluctant to have their child participate and their withdrawal was not unanticipated.

While twenty sets of parents of first grade underachievers were contacted for approval to include their children in the project, only fifteen accepted the offer. Two families were planning to leave the area upon termination of the school year, one child was to be transferred to the local parochial school and two families chose not to consent. Ironically, although there was greater apparent difficulty in obtaining consent from parents of first grade children (all parents of the third graders consented), those that did wish to have their children participate were generally far more enthusiastic than the original parents had been. These parents, for the most part, had been impressed by the unofficial publicity of the first months of the program.

During the course of the semester, October, 1966 to June, 1967, there were 435 meetings of student volunteers with their little brothers and sisters: 357 with third graders and 78 meetings with first graders. The school year was terminated with the plan that relationships would be resumed when the college students returned in the fall.

EVALUATION CONFERENCE: June, 1967

As originally proposed, the project consultants met late in June to evaluate the progress of the third graders and to consider the effect, so far, of the experience on the college students. It was agreed then to continue the third graders as a group of seventeen, one boy having moved at the end of the school year, but to pick up additional first graders to bring the number up to twenty. It was agreed not to attempt to evaluate the progress of the first graders since too few meetings had been held with their student volunteers for any definitive change.

To evaluate the progress of the children, both those receiving service and those in the control group, records, report card grades and achievement test

scores were reviewed. In order to avoid overlooking any changes in behavior, several other instruments had been employed: the California Test of Personality, the Goodenough-Harris drawing test and the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt test were administered to all pupils in the grades containing the service and control groups. The two latter tests were administered as group tests using standardized procedures and environment. In administering the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test, figures were reproduced as transparencies, and, in each classroom, projected by an overhead projector on a portable screen. Scoring was done as devised by Koppitz (4).

In addition, a behavior-rating scale devised by Carlton Marshall, M.D., of the University of Vermont, was completed by teachers of the four grades involved, a separate sheet being completed for each child and a rating obtained. While originally devised to detect symptoms of hyperkinesis, the scale was, it was agreed, useful in the present study because it requires rating in each of four categories: social maturity, nervous and muscular development, academic performance and general attitude and behavior. It is relatively complete, simple to use and rapid to score.

Report cards were studied for general indication of the student's performance and progress. Because of inherent weaknesses, however, it was not felt that these marks could be used for statistical analysis. A more accurate evaluation of the student's progress was possible by using standardized achievement test results. Battery medians for individuals and means of battery medians for classes and groups under study were plotted on a progress chart adapted from the academic progress chart used by Glidewell and Stringer (5) in their study.

To those who stand at the periphery of a big brother relationship, teachers and parents for example, the benefits of such a program are obvious and it is those people who best provide the proof of its success. However, since it is difficult to evaluate and "sell" this kind of proof, it is hoped that behavior will be sufficiently improved after several years so as to be detected by more objective measures. To illustrate the progress of the children in the service and control groups, and their respective classes, a graph of achievement test results was constructed to indicate the mean grade level scores of these groups in reference to their actual grade placement.

As indicated by the graph, Appendix I, no difference was noted at the end of the year in the progress between those children assigned to volunteers and those children in the control group. Although both groups remain considerably below their classes in general, the two groups progressed at a normal rate. These results were anticipated since it had been felt that one year of service would probably not effect much change. Too, a comparison between the progress of the service group in its third year and the control group in its fourth year is of doubtful value since it does not take into account the differences in teachers and curricula.

As stated, the California Test of Personality was chosen as an instrument that might measure changes in the personal and social adjustment of the involved children. As illustrated by the graph, Appendix II, the children selected for service scored lower as a group than their classmates at the end of the second grade but, after one year of service, that difference disappeared. Since there was no significant difference between the control group and their classmates at either the end of the third or fourth grade, comparison between the service and control children is impossible.

The behavior rating scale proved to be a worthy instrument for evaluation.

Although it depends upon the teacher's subjective judgement, it appears to be reasonably valid and merits further study as an instrument for case finding in the schools. One of the subscores provided by this test, the teacher's opinion of the child's academic performance, is far more convenient for group study than report card grades. On report cards the children are marked with respect to the level at which they are working and inter-child or inter-group comparisons by report card grades are almost impossible. On the behavior-rating scale, however, the teacher is asked to rate the child with respect to all the children she has known at that grade level. This allows an average performance-rank to be given to each child and comparisons can be made. Using this subsection, grade point averages were determined for each of the children in the service and control groups by assigning 4 points for excellent performance, 3 points for above average performance and so on.

In June, 1966, prior to the assignment of volunteers, the grade point average of the service group children was 1.43. The control group children averaged a score of 1.56. After one year of service, the service group children had increased to an average score of 1.95 while the average score of the control group was 1.74, a very slight increase.

As stated before, the success of this project is most probably going to be primarily substantiated by those who observe these children on a regular basis. The collection of impressionistic data from the teachers, parents and volunteers must be given equal consideration when the child's individual progress is appraised.

When teachers' comments were presented at the evaluation conference, all but one child in the project were considered improved. Teachers' comments included remarks such as, "now able to work independently," "no longer 'crushed' when unsuccessful," "far fewer rebellious days" and "much better acceptance by peer group." In this connection, however, the consultants caution that pupils sometimes do well when the teacher is told that they will. As reported by Rosenthal (6): "Experimenters, teachers, probably psychotherapists, and probably 'ordinary people' can affect the behavior of those with whom they interact by virtue of their expectations of what the behavior will be."

The parents were somewhat less articulate than the teachers but no less sincere in their appreciation. Some of their comments were: "it certainly has done him a lot of good," "he seems to have matured," "the best d--- thing that ever happened to my kid," "my other little girl needs a big sister too."

THE COLLEGE STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

There was a far greater need for male than female volunteers, which is generally characteristic of volunteer programs of this type. Of the twenty children selected from the third grade, eleven were boys and of the twenty children originally selected from the first grade, sixteen were boys. As was anticipated from Counseling Service experience with its on-going program, the sex ratio of the volunteers was in inverse proportion to the project's requirements: almost twice as many females volunteered as did males. Of the sixty-two females and thirty-six males who volunteered, twenty-two females and twenty-eight males were selected for assignment and for a pool of replacements.

As mentioned previously, two females and one male had to be replaced before the end of the first semester. One additional female left the project when the

girl with whom she had been working was withdrawn by her parents. No replacement was needed. When volunteers were to be assigned to first graders in February, 1967, eleven of the males who had originally volunteered either were no longer able to, or no longer cared to, participate. To get the necessary number of males, recruitment of the sophomore class was attempted by several concerned students. Eight males were contacted in this manner. After being interviewed, five accepted assignment.

In the late spring of 1967, the social worker interviewed the nineteen college students who had worked throughout the year with the third graders. Interviewing those assigned to first graders in February, 1967 was postponed until November or December of 1967, giving a longer time for the college students to become acquainted with their little brothers and sisters, thus matching the time that the third graders had been with their volunteers.

The purpose of the interviewing by the social worker was for checking on changes of majors and vocational plans, ascertaining the volunteers' feelings about the project and the children, and detecting, if possible, any changes in self-image.

On the whole - as might be expected - the college students appeared more mature, poised, thoughtful and relaxed than they had a year earlier. They had more to say about the project and were more realistic about their part in it. Many had had quite grandiose ideas about what they could do for underachieving children and fears about the details, whereas a year later, the college students were down to the very human level of being a good friend with one child, and not afraid of passing the time.

Only seven of the selected volunteers changed their major. In general about 75% of college students change majors, sometimes several times. Three stated a change of vocational plans although several talked about more definite and refined plans. A great majority of students followed through on their summer plans and did what they had anticipated and arranged in the spring of 1966. Six of the twenty-two (27%) selected and seven of the forty (17.5%) unselected female volunteers left school during this period for a total of thirteen out of sixty-two (21%). Twelve of thirty-seven (32%) of the control group females left school. None of the twenty-eight selected male volunteers left but one of the eight (12.5%) unselected male volunteers left for a total of one out of thirty-six (3%) for male volunteers. Nine of fifty-eight (16%) of the control males left school during this period.

These data would seem to indicate that the volunteer is generally more stable than the run-of-the-mill college student. It is to be noted in this connection that big sisters from the females who volunteered for the project were carefully selected from a large group, whereas the big brothers for the project were virtually non-selected since it was necessary to use all who did not eliminate themselves or who seemed at all suitable.

These data, too, are tentative and no definite conclusions can be drawn until the project has been in operation for another year.

PERSONNEL AND CONSULTANTS

Except for the replacement of the secretary, there were no changes in the project staff during the period of this report.

John Miller, Ph.D., consultant in psychology left in February to be replaced by Norman Slamecka, Ph.D., associate professor at the University of Vermont. Dr. Slamecka, who left the university in July, was in turn replaced by Harold Leitenberg, Ph.D., assistant professor at the University of Vermont.

Other consultants continue to be Hans Huessy, M.D., psychiatrist, and Ann Kimberly, M.S., psychiatric social worker. Miss Mary Hogan, principal of the elementary school involved, attended all meetings of consultants and her help and interest were invaluable. Consultants have held a total of six meetings since the beginning of the project. Five were half-day meetings and the sixth covered a two-day period.

THE STUDENT VOLUNTEER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Student Volunteer Advisory Committee of the Counseling Service continued to serve as advisory to both the project and to the Counseling Service's on-going student volunteer programs in addition to functioning as a committee of associates. The committee continues to be chaired by Harold Curtiss, Jr., Counseling Service trustee and chairman of the local school board, and membership includes Miss Hogan, Mrs. Kimberly and the Rev. Mr. Garry Campbell, pastor of a local church, as well as the following individuals from Middlebury College: Dennis O'Brien, dean of the college; Mrs. John Kelly, dean of women; Bruce Peterson, dean of men; the Rev. Mr. Norman Nelson, assistant chaplain; Professor Rudolf Haerle, chairman of the Sociology Department and Professor David Crowley of the Psychology Department.

SUMMARY

The project has continued to progress in its second phase according to the original plan submitted to and accepted by NIMH. Interesting material is being gathered on the children, service and controls, and a determination as to whether gains are sustained and expanded will be attempted.

The college student volunteers, and the controls, will continue to be observed carefully to help set criteria for the selection of volunteers for the on-going programs of the Counseling Service and other agencies and to find out how the experience affects the participants. Also to be observed is the difference between paid and unpaid service of college students and comparison will be attempted with the interpersonal relationship project at Berkeley, where Goodman (7) is working with students who are being paid and the adjective check list has been used as a measurement device.

The Counseling Service feels that it is collecting information which will be valuable to other mental health services and to colleges in determining how best to utilize volunteers. Data from the project are already helpful in this agency's on-going program and have changed certain interviewing and supervising techniques in relation to college students. In addition, much valuable material in regard to the early identification of children likely to develop emotional problems has become available and consideration is being given to use of group tests and a revised check list for this purpose in the schools of the county in addition to the local participating school.

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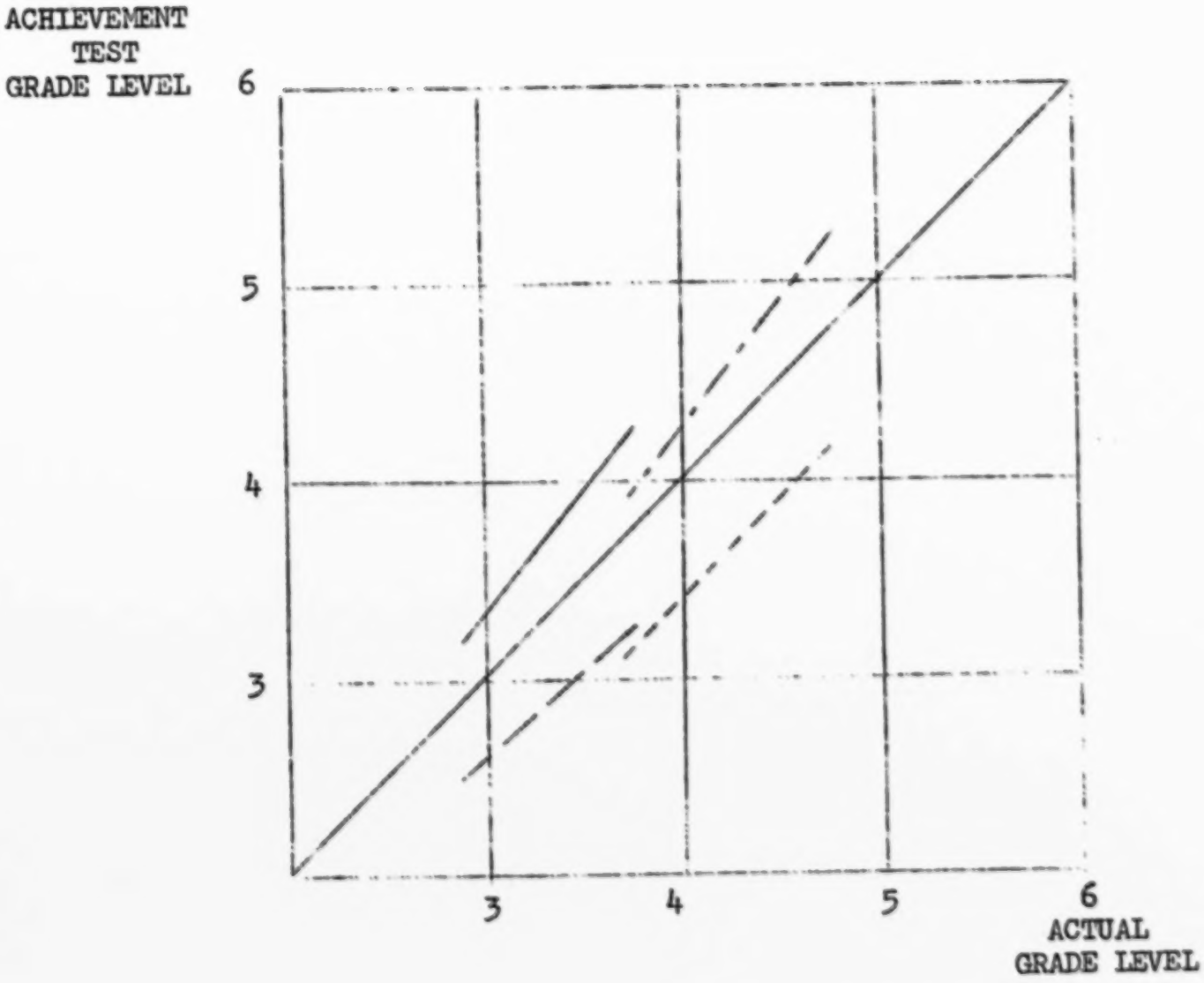
APPENDIX I



Scores plotted are means of Battery Medians

Third Grade 1966-67 ——————————

Service Group — — — — —

Fourth Grade 1966-67 — - — - — - —

Control Group - - - - - - - - - -

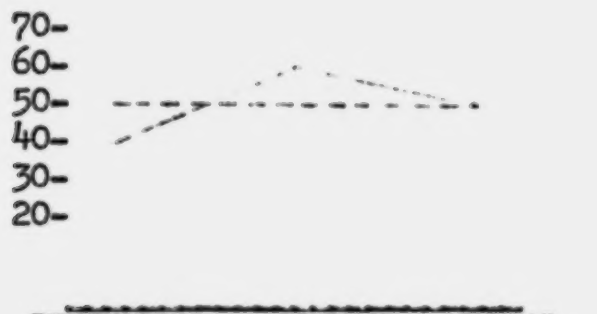
ACADEMIC PROGRESS CHART
1966 - 1967

APPENDIX II

CALIFORNIA TEST OF PERSONALITY

PERCENTILE

SECOND GRADE 1966



THIRD GRADE 1967

PERCENTILE

THIRD GRADE 1966

FOURTH GRADE 1967

MEDIAN PERCENTILE OF SERVICE OR CONTROL GROUP _____

MEDIAN PERCENTILE OF STUDENTS IN GRADE (EXCLUDING SERVICE OR CONTROL GROUP) - - - - - - - -